Own Your Profession

Professionals in the Twentieth Century are characterized by the formation of varied societies, associations and networks to support and enhance their work. Collectively, practitioners of a particular occupation can accomplish more than individuals working singly. Massage therapists are just now learning how to be a community of professionals—and there is a lot to learn.

While we in massage therapy are unique in many ways, we still have to deal with common tasks faced by most professions. These have to do with setting standards usually by certification and accreditation; encouraging and providing continuing education; promoting ethical behavior; informing the public; and protecting consumers and practitioners by, and sometimes from, government regulation.

The choice of a profession involves not only the work itself, but the social, economic, legal and political realities that surround it. These familiar words are heard over and over again from those entering the field of massage therapy. "I had no idea what I would run into just to set up a law abiding practice." "Why didn't someone tell me the problems I'd face with image, public ignorance, and demeaning and restricting laws?"

Many are overwhelmed by the problems and just give up. Many also find strength in the society of their colleagues and work for solutions.

In training for a career in massage therapy, theory and technique directly related to the work seem of utmost importance. Discussion of professional issues often takes backseat to the hands-on work. These discussions are equally important if a practitioner is to be successful in developing a practice.

And being "successful" doesn't just mean being able to make money. Prosperity is more than dollars. Success includes public recognition and appreciation of your work. It means acceptance of massage therapy as an important contribution to the well-being of the community at large. It includes respect for your training, your knowledge and your skills.

Practitioners join together in professional associations like the AMTA to work for the brightest picture of success. AMTA members tackle professional issues of national scope in national programs, and local issues through the chapters.

Members guide and do the work of the AMTA. As issues become more complex, it is the responsibility of members to stay informed by seeking correct information, discussing alternative views, and forming intelligent opinions. If we let someone else do our thinking for us, the result will be feelings of anger, disempowerment, and loss of freedom.

There are many ways for members to join in the work of the AMTA. People are needed for chapter as well as national committees. Even if you don't have the time or energy right now to hold office or work actively on a committee, you can keep informed and offer your views, and give whatever support you can for worthy projects. If everyone pitches in to whatever degree they are able, the work becomes lighter for everyone—and more rewarding. There is strength in numbers and every individual adds to the critical mass of mutual support needed to make progress.

Service to your profession is often overlooked as an avenue for personal growth. Meeting a variety of people with differing viewpoints, getting exposure to new ideas, finding out what's happening beyond your immediate world are all benefits of getting involved. Moreover, practical skills like how to run a meeting, keep records, present a report, write a press release or draft a petition to the legislature can be learned and applied in other areas of your life. It's like going to school—you can't sit there and expect someone else to put the knowledge into your head. You have to go after it—be a proactive learner.

The people who get involved in their professional society and understand the bigger picture, shape their profession and, therefore, their chosen work. We all have a stake in understanding the social, economic, legal and political milieu in which massage therapy exists.

Support what you believe in—and own your profession.

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